

Artículo de investigación

Practical and Theoretical Grounds of a Student's Autonomous Learning Activities in Professional Education

Практические и Теоретические Обоснования Автономизации Учебной Деятельности Студентов в
Профессиональном Образовании

Fundamentos prácticos y teóricos de las actividades de aprendizaje autónomo de un estudiante en la
educación profesional

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Abstract

Human capital is becoming a major factor in the development of economy and society. The focus of modern education is the individual's ability to on-going professional education and self-realization. Labor market requires from an employee not only formed competences, but also soft skills. According to the authors, a student's autonomous learning activities allow them to form independence and self-management of learning activities, which allows for further professional and personal self-realization. Therefore, the authors have conducted an empirical and theoretical study to prove their hypothesis. The obtained results give grounds for a student's autonomous learning activities.

Аннотация

Человеческий капитал становится основным фактором развития экономики и общества. Задачей современного образования является формирование способности личности к непрерывному профессиональному образованию и самореализации. Рынок труда требует от работника не только сформированные компетенции, но и владение мягкими навыками «soft skills». По мнению авторов, автономизация учебной деятельности студентов дает возможность формирования способности студента к самостоятельности и самоуправлению своей учебной деятельностью с целью дальнейшей профессиональной и личностной самореализации. С целью обоснования гипотезы, авторы провели эмпирическое и

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Keywords: autonomous learning activities, autonomy, cognitive strategies, self-management, motivation, self-reflection.

теоретическое исследование. Полученные результаты дают основания для автономизации учебной деятельности студентов.

Ключевые слова: автономная учебная деятельность; автономизация; познавательные стратегии, самоуправление, мотивация, саморефлексия.

Resumen

El capital humano se está convirtiendo en un factor importante en el desarrollo de la economía y la sociedad. El enfoque de la educación moderna es la capacidad del individuo para la educación profesional continua y la autorrealización. El mercado laboral requiere de un empleado no solo competencias formadas, sino también habilidades sociales. Según los autores, las actividades de aprendizaje autónomas de un estudiante les permiten establecer la independencia y la autogestión de las actividades de aprendizaje, lo que permite una mayor realización personal y profesional. Por lo tanto, los autores han realizado un estudio empírico y teórico para probar su hipótesis. Los resultados obtenidos dan lugar a las actividades de aprendizaje autónomas de un estudiante.

Palabras clave: actividades de aprendizaje autónomo, autonomía, estrategias cognitivas, autogestión, motivación, autorreflexión.

Introduction

The concept of a student's autonomous learning activities is not only relevant but also necessary today. The individual is the main factor in the development of modern society and economy. Investment in the education of the individual contributes to human capital growth. All these factors— knowledge, skills and personality traits – allow a person to create something new and secure their income. Business skills enable self-realization. Modern education is regarded nowadays as an investment area for state economic growth.

Labor market changes rapidly, so the requirements for employees are different. Along with professional competences, a whole set of super professional skills – soft skills, i.e skills for employment – are required. The aforementioned skills may be divided into the following groups: social and communicative (communication skills, interpersonal skills, group work, leadership, social intelligence, responsibility, communication ethics); cognitive skills (critical thinking, problem solving skills, progressive (innovative) thinking, intellectual work regulating, self-learning skills, information skills, time management); personal attributes and components of emotional intelligence (emotional intelligence, honesty, optimism, flexibility, creativity, motivation, empathy) (Raitskaya, Tikhonova, 2018).

Modern labor market imposes requirements to the system of higher professional education in the organization of the educational process. The dual approach tends to be an integral part of the professional education system. Universities should not only be controlled by ministries but also be oriented at industry and business. Students are flexible now in their choice of subjects. Distance learning is more and more popular now, providing broad opportunities to improve the professional and educational level. Many teachers prefer nowadays to upload the teaching materials to the “cloud” for independent study by students at the theoretical level, while seminars are a reinforcement of educational material in practice.

In view of the above, such an educational process is required, which could encourage a student to independence and self-management of their learning activities resulting in further professional and personal self-realization. Thus, a student's autonomous learning activities in professional education may be such opportunities. The purpose of the article is to justify the relevance and possibility of student's autonomous learning activities in the learning process. The authors identified two main issues in order to achieve the goal:

- 1) To reveal students' and teachers' understanding and relevance of “autonomous

learning activities” based on a questionnaire survey;

2) To reveal the theoretical and methodological basis for students’ autonomous learning activities.

Methods

1. To achieve the first goal, we conducted a questionnaire survey among students, which allowed to identify the following: the students’ concept of autonomous learning activities, their ability and preference to study independently new educational material, capacity to manage and plan their learning activities (set goals, allocate time), awareness of strategies required to study educational material, educational style, desire to learn other people’s experience and their concepts regarding various educational and cognitive strategies, elements lacking for learning successfully and independently, ability to analyze one’s strong and weak points. Teachers’ survey was conducted orally. Discussions allowed us to draw the conclusions concerning the teachers’ understanding of a student’s autonomous learning activities, possibility and expediency of such activities in the learning process, methods used to develop independence of students, awareness of the techniques related to skills and competence formation, as well as autonomous learning activities. Students and teachers participated in the questionnaire following the preliminary discussion and explanation of the purpose of the survey. 120 students and 20 university teachers took part in the questionnaire. The survey was voluntary and anonymous. Objects of the research were clarified prior to the survey.

2. To achieve the second goal, we focused on the analysis of Russian and foreign psychological and pedagogical literature, as well as articles indexed in the Scopus database. Scientific sources were selected based on concept provisions, which can be regarded as a theoretical and methodological base for a student’s autonomous learning activities in professional education.

Results

1. Based on the results of the survey, 80% of the respondents perceived autonomous learning activities as an independent study of educational material, preparation – as an extracurricular activity – of homework, essays, etc.; 20% – as self-education outside of universities. 35% of the students believed that they were able to plan their time and they liked to study new material

independently; 50% – had a general concept of educational strategies; 70% – had no idea about it; 30% – were aware of the strategies for learning new material and applied them in their education. 75% of the students lacked the interest, patience, time and motivation; 35% – had no adequate mentor; 10% – had everything required for an efficient learning process, 65% – would like to possess relevant skills and strategies for autonomous learning activities; 45% – knew their learning style, i.e. how they perceive and assimilate information. The teachers (95%) regarded autonomous learning activities as independent homework prepared by students, extracurricular activities, work on projects. 75% of the teachers relied in their work mainly on textbooks and the program. 80% believed that it is not a university professor’s goal to teach a student to study. A student must be able to do that and if they cannot, they must learn that by themselves. University is not the school and a professor’s task is to provide knowledge.

Therefore, the results obtained during the questionnaire survey and personal discussion allowed us to reveal the following weak points in the organization of the educational process regarding autonomy:

- on the part of students: low motivation, inability to plan and learn independently, lack of self-analysis and self-esteem, ability to identify one’s strong and weak points, ignorance of one’s learning style;
- on the part of teachers: unwillingness to deal with the learner’s autonomy, unawareness of difference between independent and autonomous learning activities, lack of the individual approach to organizing the learning process, unfamiliarity with methods of skill formation and strategies for a student’s autonomous learning activities, poor didactic materials related to the learning process.

2. Theoretical analysis of psychological and pedagogical literature, as well as dissertation research, allowed us to reveal the essence of a student’s autonomous learning activities in professional education and their difference from such concepts as self-education, self-study, independent education and self-management. The activity concept is a philosophical issue and may be defined as a mode of existence of the individual and society as a whole, which may be expressed in the active position of the individual to the world they would like to change along with changes in themselves. The learning activity is the process related to gaining knowledge and assimilating theory, acquiring skills, behavior

patterns and types of activity of a student. As for the development of learning activities, it is the development of independent and creative learning skills. The intellectual and moral development of the individual must be the result of the learning activity in its totality. T.V. Gabai defines it as follows: "Learning activity is a joint activity, in which one of the participants gains experience (main component), while the other creates favorable conditions for it, i.e. all preparatory components of learning" (Gabai, 2006, p. 116). Learning activity, as a type of activity, has the same structure: person, subject, motivation, purpose, action, and product. The subject is the current level of the student, while the product is the result gained due to new social experience.

By self-education, we understand independent education, i.e. self-training and self-learning based on personal interest. Self-learning, being an integral part of self-education, is the individually organized learning process outside of an educational institution. "Independence" is the ability of the individual to set goals, develop their own approach and strategy for the implementation, carry out intermediate and final self-control. According to M.A. Ivanova, cognitive independence can be equated to the ability to learn, since it is based on certain training skills, required both to manage one's own learning activities and to perform certain learning tasks. The author noted that the level of cognitive independence depends on the number of educational skills (Ivanova, 2018). "Cognitive autonomy" is translated by the author into English as "learner autonomy".

Self-education assumes that a person is both a subject and an object of activity. A.M. Novikov considers "self-learning (self-education)" a purposeful learning activity, managed by the person themselves without the participation of a teacher (Novikov, 2008; Raitskaya, Tikhonova, 2018). According to S.A. Dneprov, self-study is a purposeful, systematic, independent and autonomous activity of the subject in the process of self-learning directed at assimilation of knowledge, development of ideas, formulation of concepts and categories, as well as the development of skills and abilities (Dneprov, 2000).

Self-management is a complex process of development, improvement and correction of one's personality, which involves the following:

- self-analysis and identification of negative qualities as controversial and negative manifestations that need to be overcome;
- setting goals and development of a self-management program;
- self-management by self-regulating activity, behavior, including self-control and self-education (Gamibullaev, 2006; Ivanova, 2018, Nosacheva, 2017).

Concepts of self-managed and autonomous learning activities alter in foreign authors' articles (Dickinson, 1987; Dohmem, 1999; Holec, 1981; Knowles, 1975; Littlewood, 1995; Weinert, 1982). M. Knowles defined "self-directed learning" as "the process in which the individual takes the initiative, decides on their own learning, being able to determine and design their own learning needs, use and involve the required personal and material resources, including professional educational offers and assistance, to establish and organize their own educational goals, content, directions, activity rhythm and place of study; choose and use appropriate methods and evaluate their success in learning" (Dickinson, 1987). German scientists, such as Weinert, Dohmen, Wittwer etc., go further and define self-governing theory "selbst gesteuertes Lernen" as a theory in which the student has a significant impact on the situation of learning (Dohmem, 1999; Weinert, 1982; Wittwer, 2000). Dohmen points out that self-management is accompanied by support organized by the teacher, that self-organized learning and learning organized by a third party do not exclude but complement and optimize the learning process (Dohmem, 1999). According to representatives of the modern foreign school, autonomous learning activity is the quality of the individual, whose primary task is to activate the internal potential in order to "combine" it with individual abilities and skills. The individual takes the initiative, decides on their own training, determines their needs and tries to find the resources required and carry out self-management in the process of training, provided they are able to organize the process of self-management in their training. The teacher's role is not excluded in the process, on the contrary, they assume the role of a tutor, a consultant, but not a person responsible for the transfer of knowledge. The teacher's task is to create and maintain a learning environment, in which learner can behave autonomously, independently (Littlewood, 1995). The relevance of the topic under study is evidenced by the significant number of publications devoted to it. The theme is dealt with in such areas as the impact of motivation on the efficiency of autonomous

education development by creating a favorable atmosphere – the teacher's obligation, i.e their personal and professional qualities and the technologies applied (Hu, Zhang, 2017; Littlewood, 1995; Yi, 2017); modern information technologies and their influence on the educational process (Chik, 2017; Klimas, 2017; Lin, Reigeluth, 2018; Villamizar, 2019; Vurdien, Puranen, 2018); impact of a student's autonomy on the development of their creative abilities (Liu, Huang, Xu, 2018; Palfreyman, 2017).

In the works by Russian researchers, autonomous learning activities are understood as the ability of the individual to manage independently the learning process, positive attitude to the learning process, cognitive strategies and tactics, self-management of one's learning activities from setting a goal to evaluating the result, including self-reflection, ability to decide responsibly in situations of free choice regarding all components of the learning process (content, methods and forms), as well as high degree of responsibility (Koryakovtseva, 2001; Koryakovtseva, 2010; Novikov, 2008). K.F. Koryakovtseva deals with autonomous learning activities in the context of effective education, including the following:

- student's involvement in the social and cultural process as an active subject and realization of their personal potential;
- conditions required for self-expression and self-realization of a student;
- actualization of educational and cognitive activity and approach to the methods and system of this activity as the basis of independent development;
- focus on the creation by the student of an educational product personally valuable to them;
- encouragement of knowledge gained independently in order to solve a specific problem and application of such experience in activities;
- introduction of a student to a specific social and cultural context related to their activities (Koryakovtseva, 2010; Ternovikh, 2007).

Almost all studies acknowledge the great importance of cognitive strategies as a tool for self-management of one's learning activities. The subject is not as important as the method of teaching. Educational strategies are integrated into the educational process by means of sharing experience in a group (the result of learning), interviewing each other, strategy presentations,

reflection of strategies in a comprehensive mode, applying strategies at various stages of learning activities, self-observation and keeping a diary.

The formation of autonomy of one's learning activities requires the freedom of choice of tasks for independent preparation correlating with the current level and ability to carry out these tasks. The process of assessment must be constant, gradually transforming from teacher's assessment to self-reflection, self-assessment, acquiring personally significant meaning. "Portfolio" is a method allowing tracing the dynamics of one's educational and personal development. Self-learning is a way of self-development. "Knowing oneself" suggests knowledge of one's strong and weak points, emotional background, cognitive characteristics, identifying the existing experience and one's social position for further development of personality.

Analysis of approaches related to understanding and essence of autonomous learning activities allowed us to conclude the following: a student's autonomous learning activities in professional education are an integrative quality of personality, which manifests itself in the ability directly related to responsibility and conscious choice, self-regulation and self-management of one's learning and professional activities, developed through involvement in the educational process on the basis of subject-subject relations.

Conclusion

The conducted research allows us to conclude the following:

1. Students cannot study in the mode of autonomous learning activities due to low motivation, inability to plan their activities, ignorance of cognitive and metacognitive strategies and lack of self-reflection skills. Teachers cannot develop the ability to autonomous learning activities due to lack of teaching and methodological support, application of traditional methods and forms of education and subject-object relations in the educational process. The level of a student's ability to autonomous learning activities depends directly on the level of professional autonomy of a teacher.

2. A student's autonomous learning activities in professional education are an integrative quality of personality, manifested in the responsible and conscious choice to self-regulate and self-

manage one's learning and professional activities based on knowledge of cognitive strategies and their educational style.

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